

Benchmarking of Academic Programs Manual/Handbook

**Prepared by
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Preface

Based on the commitment of Qassim University to adopt the highest standards of quality and assure that its various programs comply with them, in its continual pursuit to accomplish its mission and goals. And given its main task “of supporting the academic programs to obtain national and/or international accreditation”, the Deanship of Development and Quality develops a set of handbooks to provide useful information on the proper application of NCAAA standards and criteria. The current handbook “Benchmarking of Academic Programs Manual” aims to provide fundamental background knowledge on benchmarking including its definition, types, steps and importance.

Benchmarking

The benchmark comparison has historical roots dating back to 1810 when the English industrialist Francis Lowell studied the best methods used in British flour laboratories to reach the most successful applications in this field. In the aftermath of World War II, Japan was one of the first countries to apply a benchmark widely on the scale in the early 1950's. The first documented publications in the field of performance measures date back to 1938, when the International City Management Association (ICMA) published a field study on the performance measures of local services. The applications of this method were moved to the United States of America, where Xerox is considered the pioneer in this field in 1979 in response to the competitive crisis, and in the mid-seventies the urban Institute in cooperation with the International City Management Association (ICMA) issued two volumes: the first in 1974 , And the second in 1977 AD.

In the eighties, the concept of performance measures expanded to include ideas and principles of quality, customer satisfaction and management with goals. In the early nineties of the last century, the interest in evaluating government performance got renewed, which included benefiting in the public sector field from applying the benchmark comparison in the private sector.

Benchmarking Definition

Benchmarking is a systematic and continuous process to evaluate the performance of the organization or one of the aspects of this performance through comparison with a model, whether inside or outside this organization to identify the causes of the gap and work to address it and reach the best performance. The benchmarking can also be defined as one of the tools for evaluation, development and improvement of performance by identifying the performance gap between the different units or divisions, and working to enhance the positive aspects that are distinguished, and identifying the negative aspects and working to avoid them, in order to achieve the best applications in performance.

Knowing the practices of other organizations and learning from them does not mean cloning them but rather adapting them to the circumstances of the interested organization on the one hand, and on the other hand the development of competing organizations continues during the time of the benchmarking process, and thus the gap continues despite improvement, so organizations should not focus only on keeping up with the development of others, but they should have a target to excel by having a future vision of being better. According to this vision, benchmarking means continuous research and application of new ideas, practices, and treatments for enterprise leaders and leaders in other non-competitive institutions as well. Best practices for the distribution function or human resources in an institution may not be competitive. Thus the concept of benchmarking expands outside the limits of a single activity, and becomes an expression of a continuous comparison of the organization and its parts with the best organizations regardless of activity or country, i.e. comparing the organization's performance with the

best performance in a similar institution or outside it. In short, it is a means of positive change through an external view that leads to internal improvements, by trying to answer two basic questions:

The first: How did others become better?

The second: How can we be better?

So the benchmarking is a continuous process to evaluate the performance of the organization or one of its activities or services, and it does not stop at a certain point and the evaluation process takes place within the framework of the comparative vision of the best model in this field, activity or service, whether inside or outside the organization. It can be applied to universities, educational institutions and educational programs.

Types of Benchmarking

A- Internal Benchmarking and external Benchmarking

The internal Benchmark comparison: in which the educational institution compares each department or unit with other departments and similar units in the light of certain criteria, and the required information is collected with multiple measurement tools, and this type is one of the easiest benchmark comparison.

Self-comparison: It is to compare the institution (the program) itself with its performance in previous years, and this type of comparison is useful in knowing the performance status if it is improving and developing, or it is getting worse or it is in a steady state.

External Benchmark comparison: in which the educational institution compares its performance as an institution (or program) with another institution (or a similar program in another institution) in light of certain criteria, and the required information is collected with multiple measurement tools.

B- Competitive Benchmarking

The comparison here is between higher education institutions and other corresponding and competing institutions locally or globally. Data and information are collected in direct ways through agreements with the corresponding institutions or indirectly, through websites or the media and others.

C- Operational Benchmarking

It is the one in which two organizations with the same activity are compared, such as if a university is compared with a university, a hospital with a hospital, a hotel with a hotel, or a primary school with another elementary school or between two countries.

D- Strategic Benchmarking

It examines successful strategies that have led to a competitive advantage and academic success, targeting the diagnosis of areas of strength and weakness of the comparator or who works in the activity itself as an important step in prioritizing areas for improvement and identifying new ideas that contribute to building a successful strategy.

E- Functional Benchmarking

It is for the educational institution to compare jobs it performs such as: teaching, scientific research, or community service with the same jobs in the corresponding and distinguished institutions of higher education regionally or internationally with a view to upgrading and improving these jobs. Included in this type is a comparison of common procedures among all types of institutions such as commitment to attendance, leave, work system, wages, use of modern technologies, and other aspects.

F- Cooperative Benchmarking

It is conducted by a group of institutions in cooperation with each other, through which information and performance indicators are exchanged and support and assistance is provided among them.

G- Financial Benchmarking

Comparison is conducted on the financial aspects, such as: a comparison of the budget and its disbursements in a sufficient manner, the effectiveness and methods of making use of the various sources of income, and ways to avoid financial waste.

H- Benchmarking for Optimum Performance

The best aspects are studied in an institution that is famous for a specific issue, where another institution or program wants to take advantage of its excellence in this field and follow its steps.

The Importance of Benchmarking

Because the benchmarking is one of the methods that helps the organizations to know its performance level compared to the performance of its competitors, and because it is a method of continuous improvement, its importance is highlighted through what it achieves from benefits that can be identified through the following points:

1. Rationalization of expenditures.
2. Providing continuous learning opportunities.
3. Provide an opportunity for the organization to move - internally and externally - towards better models.
4. Improving the creative and innovative capabilities of the team.
5. Providing cooperation opportunities between local organizations or units.
6. Enabling senior management to answer a set of questions.
7. Adopting an organizational culture aimed at solving problems.
8. Assisting the foundation in precisely defining the gap between its performance and that of the leading institutions in its field of work.
9. It helps to provide the appropriate climate, and enhances the desire for leadership of the institution and its employees to adopt a policy of change towards all that is better and new.
10. Help define critical processes, give them the necessary attention and priority in implementation, and actively contribute to developing individual and group creativity.
11. It actively contributes to increasing the chances of achieving additional benefits for the organization.
12. The external focus of the benchmarking method creates external competitive measures that necessarily increase the efficiency and effectiveness of internal performance quality measures, and makes them more competitive.

Benchmarking Criteria for universities (academic programs)

The university determines a number of criteria for the selection of reference (benchmarks) universities (or programs). The most important are:

- That the corresponding universities/programs fulfill the three main functions: teaching and learning, scientific research, and community service.
- That the number of students at the university or in the program is very close to the benchmark's.
- To offer the same major disciplines in the various branches of science (medical - applied - human).
- To grant the same degrees.
- Convergence in the number and efficiency of faculty members.

It is also highly recommended that the benchmark is nationally (or internationally) accredited and it has a positive reputation of high-quality services.

Steps of applying a benchmarking process

To specify a benchmark for reference comparison, the following questions must be answered:

Where do we stand compared to others?

What are the best universities to compare their activities with?

What areas of improvement are needed?

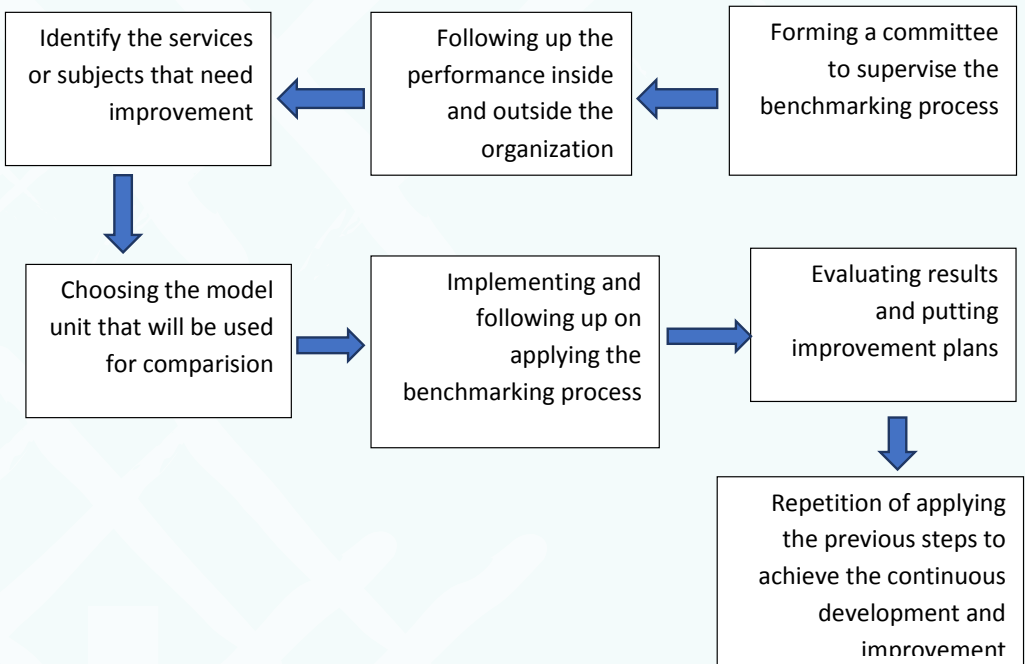
How can our university practices be applied?

How can we achieve more distinction than those universities?

Reference comparisons can be made as follows:

- Determine the reason for which the educational institution would like to make a benchmarking process.
- Determine the areas you would like to compare.

- Identify the leading universities in the field, programs and similar aspects themselves.
- Study good practices for leading universities.
- Visiting universities with optimal performance to closely review these practices and obtain answers about them.
- Implement good practices and develop an implementation plan.
- Evaluating results and developing improvement plans.
- Repeat the previous steps to achieve continuous improvement and development.



Learn from best practices

In this case, the institution emulates some institutions or programs that have some distinct practices that the university or program finds useful for them to apply these practices, even if the activities of this institution are not the same, such as:

Creating a way to establish stable financial resources and grants at universities so that it provides stable financial support to the university in line with some of the world's prestigious universities, or comparing food services for patients in university hospitals with five-star hotels, etc.

The criteria for choosing a partner for comparison

- Similarities in the educational system.
- Similarity in mission and goals.
- Ability to provide data.

Relationship of performance indicators to benchmarking

There is an integration relationship between benchmarks and performance indicators because all benchmarks need to measure the matters that the institution needs to compare either internally or externally, and therefore, after defining the main goal of conducting the benchmark, the indicators that will be used for this purpose are selected, and the dates and time period that it will be measured. These indicators help the institution to determine whether its practices and outputs are consistent with similar institutions locally and globally, and whether they are developing and improving in performance from one year to the next.

Develop and implement a plan to remedy deficiencies

To improve and develop the selected processes, the preparation must be done in an innovative and systematic manner, specifying the aspects that will be improved, the target, the time period and the responsible party.

Common mistakes when applying the benchmarking method

1. Insufficient contribution by senior management.
2. The improper selection and preparation of work teams in charge of study or application.
3. Insufficient technical support and implementation.
4. Unsuitable targets, especially in the long run.
5. Unreality in determining what needs to be achieved or the expected time for implementation.
6. Incorrect or insufficient understanding of the information or method of application at the chosen university.
7. Absence or insufficiency of follow-up.

Tips for ensuring a successful benchmark

- Focusing on operations that are of paramount importance to the institution.
- Ensure that the benchmarking is used with strategic planning, KPIs and other important factors.
- Prepare to admit that you are not the best.
- Willingness to accept new ideas from unexpected sources.
- Commitment to provide the necessary resources and overcome resistance to change.
- Understand the benchmarking process.
- Encourage the benchmarking team to visit the institutions in the field and closely review best practices.
- Financial support appropriate to concluding benchmarking agreements.
- Announcing the goals of the benchmarking project for all affiliates of the corporation.

Educational institutions that wish to persist and continue their work on the one hand, and on the other hand to achieve excellence and creativity, must always improve their performance in comparison and performance of competitors and the performance of leading institutions in their field of work.

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